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FOOD.



CROMWELL VALLEY C.S.A.
Organic Community Supported Agriculture

CVCSA Community Newsletter 2009 Season

JULY 18, 2009

Food Profile: Swiss Chard

Highlights in this issue:

- [Get to know Swiss chard](#)
- [Participate in a workshop](#)
- [Understand what's going on at the farm](#)

What is Swiss Chard?

Swiss chard is a leafy green vegetable in the same family as beets and spinach. Also called summer spinach, leaf beet, seakettle beet, or spinach beet, the stems of Swiss chard resemble celery stalks and can be white, yellow, orange, or red. Chard is sometimes bunched with different colored stems together and sold as “rainbow chard.”

Despite its name, Swiss chard is not native to Switzerland. “Swiss” was added to the name “chard” in the 19th century for the home country of the botanist who gave chard its scientific name, *Beta vulgaris*. Chard originated in the Mediterranean region – the philosopher Aristotle even wrote about it. According to the George Mateljan Foundation’s website *The World’s Healthiest Foods*, “...the ancient Greeks, and later the Romans, honored chard for its medicinal properties.”

Swiss chard is considered a nutrient powerhouse. It is an excellent source of the following vitamins and nutrients: vitamin K, vitamin A, vitamin C, magnesium, manganese, potassium, iron, vitamin E, and dietary fiber. Chard is also a good source of: copper, calcium, vitamin B2, vitamin B6, and protein. The abundance of nutrients in chard make it an essential component to maintaining the health of human bones, vision and eyes, muscle and nervous systems, digestive systems, cardiovascular systems, immune systems, and respiratory systems.

Growing and Harvesting Swiss Chard

Growing Swiss chard is a wise alternative to spinach as it can tolerate higher temperatures and water shortages better. Swiss chard’s growing season is generally from June to August, but it can continue to be harvested until the first hard frost. The outer leaves are harvested from the plant by cutting the stalks about 1.5 inches above the ground when they are still young (approximately 8 – 12 inches). Chard can also be harvested after the leaves have matured, though the stems will be not be as tender.

Chard is quite perishable so it should be used soon after harvest. Store unwashed leaves in plastic bags in the crisper of your refrigerator and try to use them within 2 – 3 days of harvest. If removed from the leaves, the stems can be stored separately and will keep a bit longer.

Using Swiss Chard

Swiss chard has a delicate flavor that is similar to its relatives, spinach and beets. It has the bitter quality of beet greens and the slight saltiness of spinach leaves. Quick-boil the chard in order to reduce the bitterness and enhance its sweet qualities. Chard should not be cooked in aluminum cookware because the oxalates in the vegetable will discolor the pot.

If you find the stems of your chard too fibrous, they can be peeled to reveal the more tender interior.

(Cont’d on page 7)

Swiss Chard Gratin (Makes about 4 side dish servings)

Swiss chard can be a versatile green. Give it a try or try something new with it!

Ingredients:

- Approx. 2 pounds Swiss chard
- Olive oil
- 1 medium yellow onion, thinly sliced
- 1 cup non-dairy béchamel (store-bought organic vegan béchamel Soja Gratin or from recipe on next page)
- 3 oz. silken tofu (optional)
- 1 ounce grated vegan cheese
- 2 tablespoons oat bran (substitute bran from another grain, or dried breadcrumbs)
- salt, pepper

Instructions:

Separate the leaves from the stalks of the chard (I use kitchen shears to cut along the stalks). Trim and slice the stalks, then chop the leaves, keeping stalks and leaves separate.

Heat a gurgle of oil in a skillet over medium heat. Add the onion and cook for 2 minutes, stirring frequently, until translucent. Add the Swiss chard stalks and cook for 5 minutes, until softened, stirring from time to time. Add the leaves and cook for 2 minutes, until just wilted.

Drain the vegetables (this is important, otherwise the excess water will pool at the bottom of the gratin dish; keep the cooking juices to use as a light broth). Season with salt and pepper (ready-made béchamel may be strongly seasoned, so season the chard accordingly).

Preheat the oven to 400° and grease a medium baking dish with a little oil.

In a bowl, whisk together the béchamel and the silken tofu, if using. Fold in the cooked chard, pour into the prepared baking dish, and level the surface. Sprinkle with vegan cheese and oat bran, and bake for 15 minutes, until set and golden. Switch to broiler setting for a couple more minutes if you'd like the top to brown a little further, but watch it closely. Let cool for 5 minutes before serving.

(Recipe adapted by contributor Elena Johnson from the blog Chocolate and Zucchini by Clotilde Dusoulier.)



(Picture courtesy of Flickr user LollyKnit.)

Vegan Béchamel

Ingredients:

- 4 teaspoons vegetable oil
- 2 tablespoons flour
- 1 cup vegan milk
- salt, pepper, nutmeg

Instructions:

Heat the oil in a small saucepan over medium heat. Add the flour, stir it in quickly with a wooden spoon, and cook for 2-3 minutes, stirring continuously, without coloring.

Remove from the heat, add a little of the milk, whisk it in to form a smooth mixture, then add the rest of the milk over medium heat, a little at a time, whisking well between each addition. Bring to a gentle simmer and cook for 5-7 minutes, stirring continuously, until thickened to a velvety consistency. Remove from the heat, season with salt, pepper, and nutmeg, and use while still warm.

(Recipe adapted by contributor Elena Johnson from the blog *Chocolate and Zucchini* by Clotilde Dusoulier.)

Even if you're vegan you can enjoy "cream" sauces. Elena shows us how.

Swiss Chard with Pinto Beans and Goat Cheese

Ingredients:

- 1 1/2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 1/2 tablespoons butter
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 pinch red pepper flakes
- 1 bunch Swiss chard - rinsed, stems removed and cut into 1/2 inch slices
- 1 (15.5 ounce) can pinto beans, rinsed and drained
- 1 small tomato, chopped
- salt and pepper to taste
- 1 tablespoon fresh lime juice
- 3 tablespoons goat cheese

Instructions:

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C). Lightly grease an 8 or 9 inch square baking dish.

Heat the oil and butter in a large skillet over medium heat. Add garlic and red pepper flakes; cook and stir until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add Swiss chard, cover and cook for 4 minutes. Uncover and mix in the pinto beans, tomato, lime juice, salt and pepper. Cover and continue cooking until the chard is wilted, about 4 more minutes.

Transfer the chard to the baking dish and dot with goat cheese, pushing it down into the dish.

Bake for 15 minutes in the preheated oven, or until the goat cheese is warmed.

Make Swiss chard fun! Try something new.

(Recipe adapted from <http://allrecipes.com/Recipe/Swiss-Chard-with-Pinto-Beans-and-Goat-Cheese/Detail.aspx> and submitted by CVCSA member Julie Polanowski.)

Suggested Modifications:

- Substitute pine nuts or kidney beans for the pinto beans
- Reduce saturated fat by using eliminating the butter and replacing vegetable oil with olive oil
- If you don't like goat cheese, try this dish with crumbled cow's milk feta or ricotta

Workshops

Learn how to
can, freeze and
cook all that
fresh food you're
bringing home!

Upcoming workshops will help you store fresh food for the winter. There's even a kid-friendly programs coming up. For more information or to sign up for any of these sessions, contact the park office at 410.887.2503 or email info@cromwellvalleypark.org for more details. Workshop details are below:

SUNDAY JULY 19

2 - 4 PM, WILLOW GROVE NATURE CENTER

FREEZING FOOD 101

Learn how to deal with the July bounty of squash and other veggies by freezing some for a taste of summer next winter! Basic preparation techniques and freezing processes for optimal taste and nutrient retention will be covered. \$3 CSA members, \$5 non-members

★ KID-FRIENDLY PROGRAM

THURSDAY JULY 23

6:30 PM - 8 PM, WILLOW GROVE NATURE CENTER

DISCOVERING WORMS

Worms are COOL, not gross! Learn some awesome facts about worms, how they help our soil and go on a worm hunt. Bring a small garden shovel and a clear, clean wide mouthed jar (at least 1 liter in size) to create your own wormery. Ages 4-8 with adult. Reservations required. \$2 CSA Members/\$4 non-members.

SATURDAY AUGUST 1

10 AM - 12 PM, WILLOW GROVE NATURE CENTER

CANNING 101

Tomatoes are ideal candidates for canning: whole, diced, juiced, or made into sauce, salsa...Learn how to safely process and preserve tomatoes as well as other fruits and veggies in glass jars for economical, long-term storage. \$5 CSA members, \$7 non-members includes canning materials.

SATURDAY AUGUST 8

3 PM - 4 PM, WILLOW GROVE NATURE CENTER

CHARD-O-RAMA: COOKING GREENS, DELICIOUSLY

Got chard? CVCSA head farmer Matt Belmont will be on hand to demonstrate quick, easy and delicious ways to deal with the bounty of summer greens.

If worms make
you squeamish,
“Discovering
Worms” is the
workshop for
you. Come learn
what makes
worms so cool!

Farm Update—Letter from the Farmers (An Encore)

For those who may have missed it last week, we're including this important letter from Matt and the farming team again this week.

Your shares and the early summer trough

I know that many of you are very concerned about the small amount of food you have so far gotten for your money. This message is to address that very legitimate concern.

Most of the traditional summer crops, such as tomatoes, summer squash, cucumbers, beans, and so on, tend to be available mostly in August and September, and I'm happy to report they're doing well. But they can start earlier in a good year, by early to mid-July, especially for beans and squash. While this year's weather has not been horrendous, there is no denying that April, May, and June were among the wettest on record. CVCSA has mainly clay-based soil which turns to glue when wet. Small-seeded crops such as carrots need a finely prepared seedbed which is nearly impossible to accomplish under such conditions. So we just didn't plant any parsnips or spring carrots. Larger-seeded crops such as peas and potatoes can do better, but for a time we simply could not work the ground except just to crack it open with our "subsoiler." So we just threw the seeds on top of the ground and dropped compost or leaves on top of them. Other crops were started from seed in the greenhouse and transplanted. We managed this with some difficulty in our uppermost field, since it dries out more quickly than some of our other fields, but our squashes had to wait until late June before the ground dried enough to work the area. Our first field tomatoes were simply planted in the muck with black plastic thrown over them. All in all, considering the circumstances, these crops are not doing badly, especially the tomatoes, but they will take another 2-3 weeks to mature.

Our greenhouses, on the other hand, are stuffed full of tomato plants gone crazy, and your first tomatoes will probably come from them.

Our strawberries, which started out with so much promise, were ruined by moisture-induced grey mold and small black bugs which loved the water-soaked fruit. We need to devise a means to keep the rain off them when they are fruiting.

Other factors leading to delay include the two months we had to spend fixing our fences, which were mauled by high winds, rampaging deer, and decaying fence posts. We did not finish this until late March, thus delaying the earliest spring plantings. Your peas should have been planted two weeks earlier than they were, but if we had done so, you would possibly not have had any peas at all, since they could have been deer food. Late peas are scarce peas, since they don't like even mild heat very much.

We also gave ourselves more than the usual spring workload by putting time into constructing two new greenhouses and conducting a plant sale Mother's Day weekend. The greenhouses will pay off in earlier and more abundant tomatoes, some winter vegetables, and earlier production of certain crops next year. The plant sale yielded badly needed revenue for the CSA. So I do not regret those two activities. We will simply need to budget our labor-time better next time.

(Cont'd on page 5)

Being a member of a CSA means sharing the risks and joys of farming.

Farm Update—Letter from the Farmers (Cont'd from page 5)

It was good weather for greens, at least, until two weeks ago. Then, as the rains stopped, the control box for our pump shorted out due to moisture. So we had no water on our greens and lettuce for nearly a week. This has now been repaired so you should have resumed lettuce and greens production next week.

In addition, in our haste to give you something for your money sooner, we started picking these items before they had fully sized up, leading to chronic small quantities. So we have temporarily ceased picking them to let them size properly with our renewed irrigation.

So what now? For this week, I can guarantee only potatoes and garlic, both in good quantity and excellent quality, but that's all. You can judge for yourself if that's worth the drive to the farm. Next week, you will have lettuce and chard back in your shares, and perhaps some scallions as well. The blackberries high on the hill will come ripe. Perhaps late next week we will start to have cherry tomatoes. The following week I hope to see the first of the cherry tomatoes, summer squash, and cucumbers. The week after that (the first week of August) we should start to have large tomatoes and our first apples. By mid-August our raspberries will begin to produce and the tomatoes will start to overwhelm us. Around this time the pole beans will make their presence felt as well.

The week before Labor Day will probably see watermelons, eggplant, and peppers.

I will update this forecast as the season progresses. Fall crop forecast will be given in a month.

So I don't know if it helps you to feel better right now to know you'll feel better in the future, but it's highly probable that you will. If you want to see for yourself the state of our fields and what's in them, please attend the potluck welcoming our Americorps volunteers on Sunday, July 18 (see page 5 for details). I will include, if possible, a midsummer farm tour.

Thank you all for being members of Cromwell Valley CSA this year. You share the risks and joys of farming with us. While delayed gratification is often overstated, in this case its rewards are more certain than usual.

Yours truly,

Matt, Mo, Andrea, and Austin—your farm crew

Food Profile: Swiss Chard (Cont'd from page 1)

The University of Illinois Extension's website Watch Your Garden Grow writes of chard: "In the US the leaves are valued while European cooks value the stalks to the point of discarding the leaves or feeding them to animals."

Young chard leaves can be used raw in salads and sandwiches while older chard can be used in place of spinach in any cooked application such as lasagnas, soups, or sautés. Remember that the stems are thicker and more fibrous and therefore you should begin cooking them a few minutes before the leaves. The large leaves of chard are ideal for wrapping around other foods. For a healthier alternative to stuffed cabbage, try filling chard leaves with a vegetable and cous cous mixture and then baking the packages in the oven. A classic French preparation for chard is a creamy gratin. See the recipe section for a healthier vegan version from a Parisian food blogger (gratin de blettes, in French).

Resources:

WHFoods.org

<http://whfoods.org/genpage.php?tname=foodspice&dbid=16>

UrbanExt.Illinois.edu

<http://urbanext.illinois.edu/veggies/chard1.html>

GardeningPatch.com

<http://www.gardeningpatch.com/vegetable/growing-swiss-chard.aspx>

ChocolateAndZucchini.com

http://chocolateandzucchini.com/archives/2009/04/swiss_chard_gratin_with_vegan_bechamel.php

In Your Shares

In the coming week, you can expect:

- Potatoes
- Garlic
- Chard
- Beets (Tuesday)
- Lettuce (Saturday)



(Picture courtesy of Flickr user [thebittenword](#).)

For the Kids

Name: _____

Date: _____

Eat Your Vegetables Alphabet Activity



Complete the activity.

1. _____
2. _____
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spinach	pepper	asparagus	beans	lettuce
zucchini	broccoli	potato	cabbage	radish
cucumber	artichoke	rhubarb	pea	brussels sprouts
alfalfa	corn	celery	yam	carrot
parsley	onion	cauliflower	pumpkin	avocado